



THE WITNESS

St. Stephen's Church Newsletter

Volume 31, Issue 7
The Rev. Mark Bradford, Pastor

July 2020
Church Phone (405) 843-5333

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

A few times in my career as a pastor I have heard people say, "I hope that I make it," as in *make it into heaven*. I always cringe when I hear these words. I do understand that from time to time people have doubts. Doubts about whether there is a God, doubts about the Christian faith and, yes, doubts about their own salvation. However, as God's children, we can have an assurance of our salvation. This assurance is what chapter XVIII of the Westminster Confession of Faith is about. It is entitled "Of Assurance of Grace and Salvation."

Chapter XVIII begins by noting that those who are unregenerate may deceive themselves with false hopes of being in God's favor and having salvation. In other words, there are those who have an assurance of their salvation when they should not. On the other hand, those who truly believe in the Lord Jesus and love Him sincerely "may in this life, be certainly assured that they are in the state of grace, and may rejoice in the hope of the glory of God, which hope shall never make them ashamed." 1 John 5:13 says, "I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God that you may know that you have eternal life." We can know for sure! Earlier in his letter John points out some signs by which we can be sure that we truly know God. "And by this we know that we have come to know Him, if we keep His commandments." (1 John 2:3)

The Confession goes on to say that the certainty of our salvation is not based on conjecture or persuasion grounded upon a fallible hope; rather, it is an infallible assurance of faith based on three

things. First, "the divine truth of the promises of salvation." Hebrews 6 speaks of the certainty of God's promises which includes the promise of salvation to those who believe. Second, "the inward evidence of those graces unto which these promises are made." The inward evidence is the evidence of a changed life. Third, "the testimony of the Spirit of adoption witnessing with our spirits that we are the children of God." Romans 8:15-16 says, "but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, 'Abba! Father!' The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God."

But what about doubts? The Westminster Confession does allow for this. The fourth paragraph of Chapter XVIII says, "True (note the word true) believers may have the assurance of their salvation divers (in different ways) shaken, diminished, and intermitted." The Confession discusses some of the things that can cause our assurance to be shaken. A big one is falling into some sin which wounds the conscience and grieves the Holy Spirit. Another possible cause might be a bit surprising; the Confession puts it this way: "God's withdrawing the light of His countenance, and suffering even such as fear Him to walk in darkness and to have not light." There are times in our lives when God seems/feels distant. The monks who at times were referred as the Desert Fathers used to refer to "the dark night of the soul." The Confession concludes by saying, "Yet are they never utterly destitute of that seed of God, and life of faith, that love of Christ and the brethren, that

sincerity of heart, and conscience of duty, out of which, by operation of the Spirit, this assurance may, in due time, be revived; and by which, in the meantime, they are supported from utter despair.”

I believe that as God’s people we can have an assurance of salvation. A couple of my favorite passages on this assurance are from 1 John. Earlier I quoted 1 John 5:13. 1 John 5:11-12 says, “And this is the testimony, that God gave us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. Whoever has the Son of God has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life.” Being assured of our salvation is such a wonderful thing. We can have this assurance because our salvation is not based on anything that we do or don’t do, but on what Christ has done for us. In terms of whether we are going to heaven, we do not have to “hope so.” We can “know so.”

Yours in Christ, *Pastor Mark*

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Worship Schedule

Sunday

9:45 Adult Sunday School

11:00AM – Worship

11:00AM – Streaming online Worship

JUNE SERMON TOPICS

We will be finishing up our series on the Book of Proverbs on July 19. On July 26 I will be preaching the lectionary passage from the Book of Psalms for that particular Sunday.

July 5 Proverbs 16:1-9, 33

The LORD Has Made Everything for its Purpose

July 12 Proverbs 24:23-34

Sayings of the Wise

July 19 Proverbs 30:1-9

Personal Observations

July 26 Psalm 119:129-136

God’s Testimonies are Wonderful



OUR SERVICE ONLINE

We will continue to live stream our services at our usual time, 11:00AM. You will be able to watch the service on Facebook at facebook.com/StStephensOKC.

June Session Minutes

FINANCIAL REPORT: The Session was provided a financial report that included updates on the church’s current financial position and the Budget Committee meeting with proposed 2020/2021 budget. Motion was made to accept the financial report. Motion unanimously passed. Motion was made to accept the proposed 2020/2021 budget. Motion unanimously passed.

WORSHIP: Mark McBride led a discussion on the live streaming of St. Stephen’s worship service. Indications are that it has been very well received with hopes that it will continue.

OLD BUSINESS: The pictorial directory is moving ahead very slowly.

NEW BUSINESS: The recognition of high school graduation was placed on the calendar to be held during the July 26, 2020 worship service.

SMALL GROUPS

Bible Study & Prayer – TBA

Monday Prayer Group – TBA

Tuesday Bible Study – July 21 at 2:30PM

Men’s Prayer Group – Saturday mornings at 7:30AM

Prayer Requests

If you have missed prayers or would like to be added to the Women’s Fellowship prayer chain please call Doris Cornell 605-6172 or Treva Gullett 735-9908.

Fellowship Hour Treats

July 5 – Karen & Matt Stillwell, Keith & Karin Seidemann

July 12 – Margo Whiting, Laurie Daub

July 19 – Carla & Nelson Pickrell, Jaquelyn Kuhn

July 26 – Patsy Kuhn, Pat Robison

Needed: Donations of cheese and sausage for Sunday mornings would be greatly appreciated.

Ushers

July 5 – Michael Bassett, Pat Robison, Wendy Smith, Nancy Spradling

July 12 – Christa & Sumish Charlie, Wendy Smith, Nancy Spradling

July 19 – Michael Bassett, Pat Robison, Wendy Smith, Nancy Spradling

July 26 – Youth

Women's Fellowship

Women's Fellowship has decided to have a July 14 meeting to get back together and socialize. There will be a quick meeting to solidify officers but the rest of the time will be a time of gathering and fellowship. Regular 11:00AM meeting time. All women are welcome to join.

MEET OUR ST. STEPHEN'S FAMILY



Mark McBride

Mark was born in Lubbock, Texas. As a child he lived in Wichita Falls, San Antonio, Austin, Del Rio, and Houston. The family moved to Oklahoma City when Mark was entering 8th grade. After college, and a break-up with his "soul mate" Molly, he moved to Hawaii. After only two months he realized how much he missed Oklahoma. He reconnected with Molly, and the couple vowed to marry and make their home in Oklahoma City.

They now live in Crown Heights with ten-year-old Lucy, and five-year-old twins Benjamin and Eleanor. Their son Henry tragically died in a drowning accident at the age of only 14 months. (He would be 8 years old today.)

The family pets are: Hercules (a corgi), a guinea pig named Munchies and Yoda, a tortoise.

Molly's mother and father (Carla & Nelson Pickrell) and her sister (Lori) reside in the same Crown Heights neighborhood. Mark also has a sister and family in Edmond.

When asked what he considers to be his proudest accomplishment in life so far he replied: "My marriage and family."

A nature lover, Mark earned a degree in Wildlife and Ecology from OSU and a minor in Journalism. He is a freelance videographer, recently working in

internal communications for Continental Resources. He has also done work for Sonic, Children's Hospital, Channel 9 News, and a number of other organizations.

Mark loves the outdoors, boating, fishing, hiking and camping with his kids. He is looking forward to taking his new boat to Lake of the Arbuckles. He enjoys classic country and many other types of music. A big fan of Lyle Lovett, Mark had the pleasure of interviewing him for Channel 9 News while Lyle was in Oklahoma City for a Quarter Horse Show. Another favorite artist, Mary Chapin Carpenter, he met in person back stage at a Blue Grass Festival.

Mark and Molly were married here at St. Stephen's in 2006 by Pastor Mark. Molly's parents were charter members of our church.

He loves the "tight-knit" family atmosphere and diversity of our congregation's members who "love and care for each other." He expressed deep appreciation for our Pastor and the special "thought and experience he puts into all he says." He believes Pastor Mark is our church's "best kept secret."

Mark McBride has graciously shared his talent as a videographer with his church. Along with John Robison, and John's sons, Chris and Will, Mark has spent the last ten weeks working to set up quality live streaming of the St. Stephen's Sunday worship services. What a blessing for those of us who have been home-bound for so long!

Albert Einstein (1879-1955) once said, "*Science without religion is lame, religion without science is blind.*" In today's world of rapidly advancing science in various forms...Praise and gratitude to Mark, who brings the science of video computer technology to the worship of our Lord!!

By Margo Whiting

BABY ANNOUNCEMENT

Kinley Stateler was born on May 1 to Toni & Brennan Stateler and big sister, Rory. Proud grandparents are Rebecca & Randy Stateler and great grandma, Patsy Robison.

PASSING

Our **Dean Mikkelson** passed away April 24 at the Veteran's Center in Claremore, OK at the age of 97.

HYMN OF the Month



The Old Rugged Cross

It is #327 in our hymnal

This is a Church Member requested hymn

Dating back to 1912, “The Old Rugged Cross” is credited to George Bennard. Bennard penned the first verse of this hymn in response to ridicule he received at a revival meeting, while meditating on John 3:16. He continued to write verses of the hymn during revival meetings, eventually performing it as a duet with Edward E. Mieras at the conclusion of a revival meeting tour. They were accompanied on organ by Pearl Torstenen Berg. Charles H. Gabriel, a well-known gospel-song composer assisted Bennard with the harmonies for the hymn. The completed final version, was performed on June 7, 1913 by a five-member choir and accompanied by guitar. The hymn was published in 1915 and recorded in 1921. “The Old Rugged Cross” uses a sentimental popular song form with a verse/chorus pattern in 6/8 time, and it speaks of the writer's adoration of Christ and His sacrifice at Calvary. The cross and its meaning for believers are the themes of this hymn. The cross is seen as “the emblem of suffering and shame” in the first stanza, yet it has “a wondrous attraction” in the second and “a wondrous beauty” in the third. This text was not accepted by most major hymnals until the 1950s, despite great popularity. One reason was the prohibitive fee charged by the copyright owner. Another was the somewhat controversial nature of a hymn expressing such great affection for the cross itself, rather than for Christ, who died on it. The tune is in the traditional gospel hymn tune with a refrain, during which the lower voices echo the melody. There is some disagreement in different congregations about the exact rhythm of the opening line, because the natural rhythm of the words and the written rhythm of the music do not exactly align.

George Bennard was born in 1873 in Youngstown, Ohio. While still a child, his family moved to Albia, Iowa, and later to Lucas, Iowa. His father died suddenly, compelling the young George to support his mother and sisters rather than working

as a Christian Evangelist. He served for a number of years in the Salvation Army before converting and becoming an ordained minister in the Methodist Episcopal Church. Bennard preached throughout the United States and Canada, spending most of his life in Michigan and Wisconsin. He retired to Reed City, Michigan, where he died in 1958. Reed City hosts a museum dedicated to his life and ministry. He is buried in Inglewood Park Cemetery, in Inglewood, California. This cemetery is typically reserved for notable people in the entertainment, sports, and political fields. He wrote many hymns, with his two most famous being “The Old Rugged Cross” and “Speak, My Lord.”

For Hymn of the Month requests, contact Kaleb at kalebbenda@gmail.com or (405)-410-9331.

A KINDLED FIRE

“I can worship outside among nature just as well as I can inside a church building.” That claim is especially common during the summer, when church attendance tends to decline.

Certainly it's possible to worship and talk to God among his creations. In fact, George Washington Carver called nature “an unlimited broadcasting station, through which God speaks to us every hour, if we will only tune in.” And Martin Luther said, “God writes the Gospel not in the Bible alone, but also in trees, and in the flowers and clouds and stars.”

Yet corporate, or church, worship is still vital. Luther also noted: “At home, in my own house, there is no warmth or vigor in me, but in the church when the multitude is gathered together, a fire is kindled in my heart and it breaks its way through.” When we're away from God's house, we miss blessings and opportunities including communion, fellowship and support. So this summer, spend time in nature but don't neglect “to meet together” (see Hebrews 10:25)!

Prescription Drugs

If you have any prescription drugs to donate, please give them to Laurie. **No expired medications will be accepted.**

CHURCH OFFICERS

Elders

Class of 2020

John Hermes	202-9621	President of Corporation/ Nominating
Mark McBride	410-2003	Worship

Class of 2021

Lori Pickrell	503-9585	Treasurer
John Robison	627-3565	Outreach
Joan Miranda	210-1731	Nurture

Class of 2022

Robert Buswell	426-7429	Clerk/Stewardship & Memorials
Wendy Smith	850-6564	Fellowship

Deacons

Class of 2020

Christa Charlie	834-7031	Flowers
Nancy Spradling	206-5828	Ushers/Greeters

Class of 2021

Michael Bassett	942-2074	Church Work Days
Erin Von Tungeln	410-5901	Clerk

Class of 2022

Robin Page	514-8240	Missions
Keith Seidemann	474-5454	Transportation

WITNESS DEADLINE

July 20 is the deadline to submit articles for the August 2020 *Witness*. You may bring items to the church office or e-mail them to: secretary@ststephensokc.org.

Thanks! Laurie Daub, St. Stephen's Secretary
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JULY Birthdays

4	Austin Andrews
5	Elizabeth Garrett
6	Elizabeth Bradford
6	Joan Miranda
6	Dorothy Powell
7	Katie Jones
8	Branden Dillard
8	Margo Whiting
10	Glenda Leinbach
11	Nelson Pickrell
12	Gentrie Hinline
16	Micah Morgan
18	Christa Charlie
19	Mary Walker
19	Matthew Stillwell
21	Hunter Page
22	Cher Brooks
25	Hudson Von Tungeln
25	Dan Dutcher
25	Laurie Daub
29	Pat Tsoodle
29	Kym Manning
30	Mark Bradford
31	Peyton Hinline

JULY Anniversaries

7	Seth & Erin Von Tungeln
8	Aaron & Gentrie Hinline
26	Michael & Joy Bassett
29	Dan & Shelley Dutcher

***If we have missed your birthday or anniversary, please contact the church office.*

Special Dates

U.S. Independence Day, July 4

